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Diversity, leadership reflected in winners of 2006 Latino Caucus Spirit Awards

SACRAMENTO – State lawmakers today celebrated the diversity and leadership shown among winners of the 2006 Latino Spirit Awards presented by the California Latino Legislative Caucus.

This year's ceremonies included Lifetime Achievement Awards, with the man's award presented to the family of former-Asm. Marco Firebaugh, who died March 21, and the woman's award going to Sen. Martha Escutia, leaves office the end of this year because of term limits.

"These honors serve as an inspiration to Californians everywhere," said Asm. Joe Coto, D-San Jose, incoming chair of the Latino Caucus. "Latinos especially should make note that hard work and dedication can make anyone a winner."

The following are short biographies of today's winners:



Evelyn Cisneros

Evelyn, a former principle dancer with the San Francisco Ballet, has been the leading role in a diverse repertoire of classical ballets such as Swan Lake, Sleeping Beauty, Romeo and Juliet, La Sylphide, and La Fille Mal Gardée. Evelyn has been featured in many magazines including Hispanic Magazine and widely recognized for her community activism and artistic achievements. Now retired from her art, she has dedicated herself to educating others. She has maintained her involvement with the San Francisco Ballet and has recently co-authored "Ballet for Dummies" with conductor Scott Speck. Evelyn is married to principal dancer Stephen Legate and they have a son and daughter, Ethan and Sophia.



Giselle Fernandez

Giselle is a multifaceted journalist who has anchored and reported in top positions in Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami and New York. She is the president of her own production company, Skinny Hippo Productions and has branched into the world of film making completing her first featured length documentary, *Our Story* in 2004. Focusing on the advancement of others, she actively lectures on the subjects of Latina empowerment, education and health. Giselle splits her time between Los Angeles and Fiji with her husband, John Farrand, former CEO of Panavision, Inc.



Esai Morales

Esai is an actor/activist who focuses on creating a positive image of Latinos. His filmography includes films such as *La Bamba*, *Mi Familia* and *the Disappearance of Garcia Lorca*, among many more. His portrayals of ordinary men struggling under extraordinary circumstances and conflicts allow him to display his talent as a connoisseur of human emotion. Among his other notable accomplishments, Esai co-founded the National Hispanic Foundation for the Arts (NHFA) which was created to advance the presence and quality of Latinos in media. He has also assisted various charitable organizations such as the Wildlife Preservation Fund in Costa Rica and is active with “alternative AIDS” programs such as *Alive and Well* and *H.E.A.L.* Esai currently resides in Los Angeles.



Yasmin Davidds

Yasmin is an international best-selling author and motivational speaker who addresses women empowerment. She is well known for her most recent self-help system, *The Latinas 7 Principles* and her best-selling book *Empowering Latinas: Breaking Boundaries, Freeing Lives*. She has inspired women to change their futures by learning to take personal responsibility for their lives, and finding happiness through self-esteem. Davidds serves on the Board of Directors for H.O.P.E. (Hispanics Organized for Political Equality), the USC Mexican-American Alumni Association, is a member of the San Diego State University Associated Council, the Financial Board, and the Associated Executive Committee. Davidds resides in Los Angeles with her daughter Divina.



Carlos “Famoso” Hernandez

Carlos is an international boxer who has inspired many through his tenacity and spirit. Born in South-Central Los Angeles of Salvadorian origin, he has become a role model to the Latin American community. Carlos began his professional boxing career at the age of 21 under the management of legend Jacky McCoy. With McCoy’s guidance, Carlos had a 19 match winning streak which gained him media attention as being champion material. Winning the hearts of many in his home country, he received “El Aguila Dorada” for being one of the most representative sportsmen of El Salvador and Ambassador of the Sports, given by the Salvadoran Legislative Assembly. In 2003 in Las Vegas, Nevada he won the World Championship defeating in eight rounds Puerto Rican, David Santos. His record is 47 fights, 41 victories, 25 by knockout, 5 defeats and 1 tie.



Jessica Mendoza

Jessica is an athlete and mentor who strives to give her strongest effort in everything she does. As an undergraduate at Stanford University she led the Women’s Softball team to their first ever appearance at the NCAA Women’s College World Series. In 2002 Jessica was recognized as Stanford’s Female Athlete of the Year. As a member of the US Women’s National Softball team she won the Gold medal in the 2004 Athens Olympic Games, the 2002 World Championships and the 2003 Pan-American Games. Jessica has been proclaimed as a natural and talented athlete who serves as an inspiration to many young women. Understanding the

difference and impact she can make in the lives of children, Jessica speaks at high schools and for organizations as well as mentors minority children in underserved communities in reading and writing.



Martha M. Escutia

Martha M. Escutia was first elected to the California State Assembly in November 1992 to represent the 50th Assembly District of southeast Los Angeles County. Currently Senator Escutia represents the 30th Senate District. During her tenure in the Legislature, Senator Escutia has held key leadership positions and is currently the Chair of the Senate Committee on Energy, Utilities and Communications and the Latino Legislative Caucus.

Her accomplishments are highlighted by landmark legislation protecting health and the environment, improving opportunities for education and defending the rights of consumers and workers. A native of Los Angeles, Senator Escutia is married to Leo Briones and has two sons, Andres and Diego.



Marco Antonio Firebaugh

Marco Antonio Firebaugh served in the California State Assembly from 1998 to 2004 representing the 50th Assembly District located in southeast Los Angeles County. During his tenure in the Assembly, Firebaugh was recognized for an impressive legislative and advocacy record on behalf of California's working families and their children. Moreover, the experience established him as a leader and role model in the Latino Community. He was the Chair of the California Latino Legislative Caucus and in 2002 was appointed Majority Floor Leader. Alongside former Speaker Herb J. Wesson, Jr., Firebaugh served as Floor Leader from 2002 to 2004 making him the highest-ranking Latino in the Assembly. Firebaugh passed away on March 21, 2006. He was a servant for the people and will be remembered in the hearts of many whose lives he fought to improve. He is survived by his two children, Ariana and Nicolas.

*Past honorees include pioneers in film, athletics, literature, music and public service. Many have overcome tremendous obstacles, rising to role models and community leaders. Past honorees include: **Carlos Santana**, Grammy Award-winning recording artist; **Oscar De La***

Hoya, world boxing champion; Andy Garcia, Academy Award-nominated actor; and Jeff Garcia, NFL quarterback.

For more, including biographies of the winners, visit the Latino Caucus Web site at the address below.

(Formed in 1973, the Latino Legislative Caucus draws on the unique background and experiences of its nine Senators and 18 Assembly members to address issues affecting every Californian. More, including [downloadable pictures](#) of today's events, at [HTTP://DEMOCRATS.ASSEMBLY.CA.GOV/LATINOCAUCUS](http://DEMOCRATS.ASSEMBLY.CA.GOV/LATINOCAUCUS))